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# The Cuban Military Establishment

A Research Paper

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*Research for this report was completed  
on 23 March 1979.*

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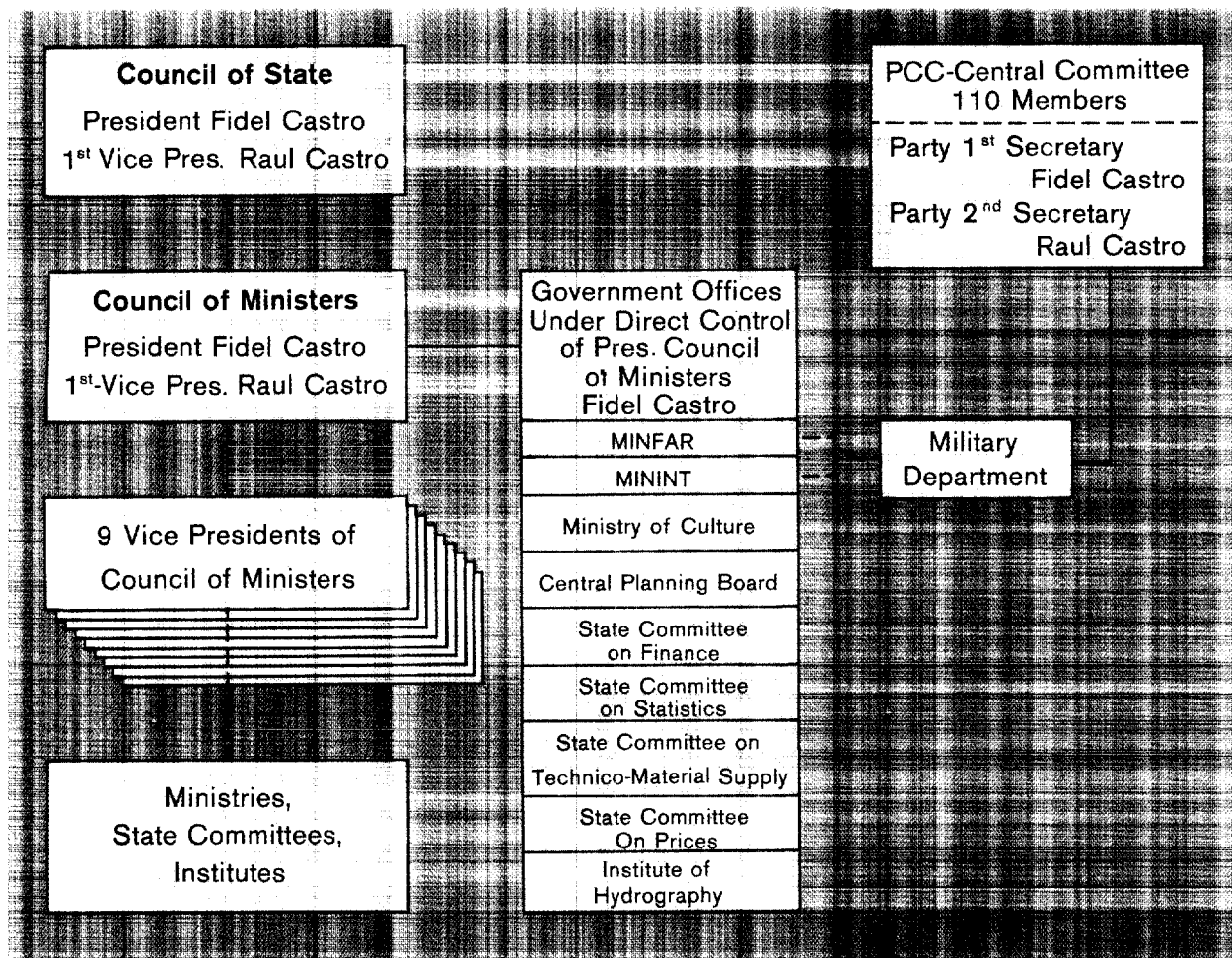
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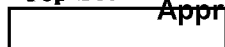
## The Cuban Military Establishment



Government  
Party Control

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## The Cuban Military Establishment

### Key Judgments

- Since the last half of 1975, when Cuba shipped weapons to Angola and the USSR began to supply new military equipment to Havana, it has become apparent that the Cuban armed forces can lend substance to Fidel Castro's commitment to support leftist governments and revolutionary movements abroad and are capable of deployment within a relatively short period of time. The changes occurring in the military that are making the Cuban Government a more powerful international actor are:
- The increase in size of Cuba's armed forces since 1975, reversing a trend toward a smaller military establishment that began in 1970. It is the second largest in Latin America, after Brazil, and the most experienced in combat.
- The resumption of the militarization of Cuban society evident in the 1960s, including expansion of the reserves and increasing regimentation of secondary schools.
- The influx of Soviet weapons, which have been instrumental in allowing the expansion of traditional missions to include offensive tasks that emphasize mobility of forces and dynamic tactics.

- The low cost of military modernization as a result of Soviet underwriting of Cuba's acquisition of military equipment since 1962.

- The increase in Cuba's ability to move its armed forces overseas as its civil air and merchant fleets expand.

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As a consequence of these changes and its experience in Africa, Cuba's military is a potentially dominant force in Latin America and one that poses a substantial advantage when deployed abroad. Cuba is the only country in Latin America to have undertaken a major military effort abroad since World War II. Its forces have scored notable successes thousands of miles from home twice in the last three years, and Castro is not reluctant to use them again.

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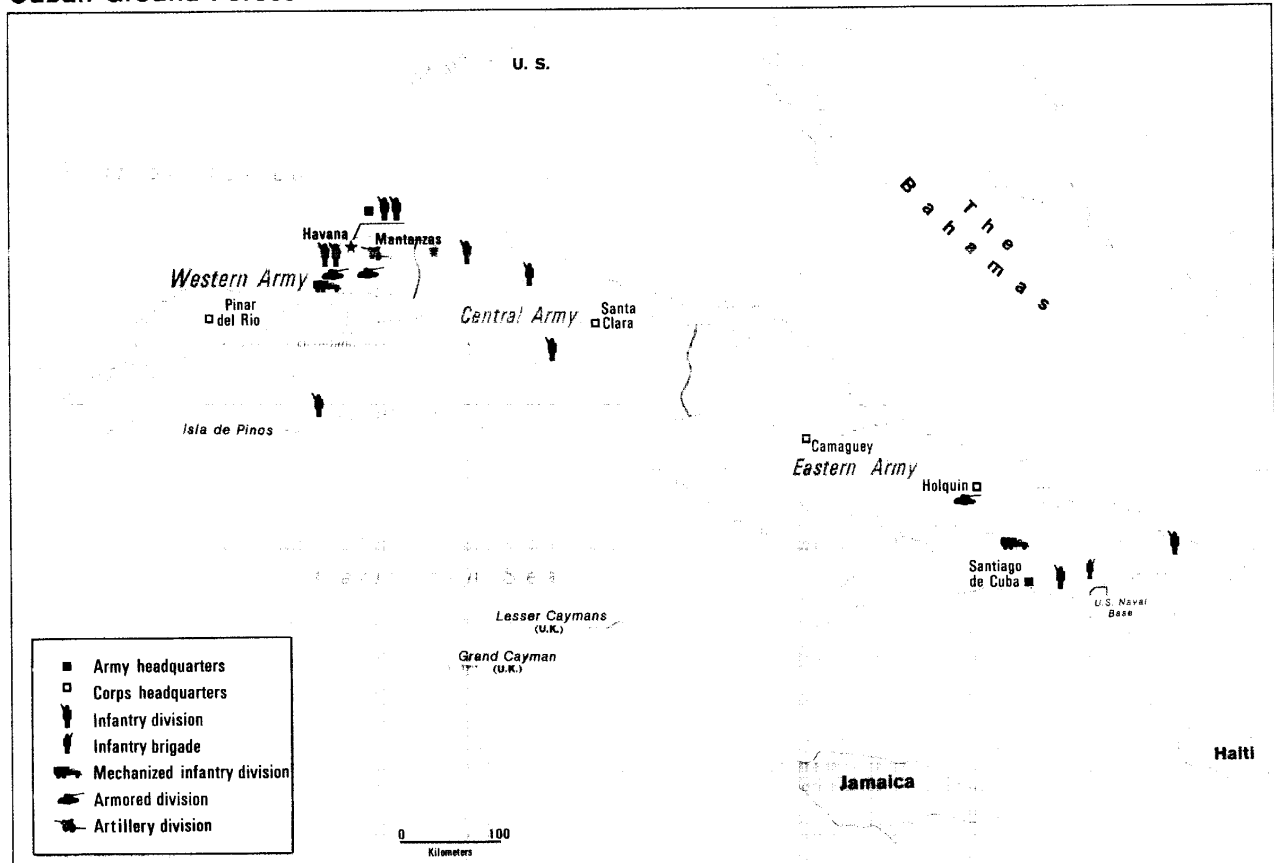
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# Cuban Ground Forces



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## The Cuban Military Establishment

### Resurgence in Size

During the 1960s Cuba had between 250,000 and 300,000 men and women—not counting militia—in its standing armed forces. This strength had grown in response to fears of a US invasion, but as perceptions of this threat diminished the leadership became hard pressed to justify so large a fighting force. When the economy took a downturn in 1970, the Castro regime, partly at Soviet urging, reduced its forces by some 60 percent, eventually freeing more than 150,000 people for full-time employment in the civilian labor force.

All branches of the armed services except the Air Force were affected noticeably. The Air Defense Force shrank from six brigades and 24 occupied SA-2 surface-to-air missile sites to three brigades and 18 sites, leaving eastern Cuba unprotected by surface-to-air missiles. The Navy lost a number of radar surveillance posts, again to the detriment of eastern Cuba. The Army was more than halved in size and reorganized.

Largely as a result of the decision to send troops overseas (some 32,000 to 36,000 are in Angola and Ethiopia, rotated on a yearly basis), the armed forces have increased to more than 160,000 active-duty personnel after a low of 120,000 in the early 1970s.

### The Military Establishment and Its Involvement in Civilian Life

The Cuban military establishment comprises the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (MINFAR) and the Ministry of the Interior (MININT), directly subordinate to President and Commander in Chief Fidel Castro. Next in the line of command and Fidel's choice as his successor is Minister of the Armed Forces Raul Castro, who holds the second highest position in the government and in the Cuban Communist Party. Sergio del Valle, a guerrilla during the revolution and later Raul's ranking deputy in MINFAR, has been Minister of Interior since 1968. All three hold military rank—Raul is the country's only four-star general, and Del Valle is one of

only a dozen officers at the two-star, division-general level. All three are members of the 13-member Political Bureau, the country's highest decisionmaking body.

Raul commands the loyalty of the military and security forces personnel, many of whose leaders served with him in the mountains against Batista and in the postrevolutionary struggle against anti-Castro forces. This experience and the promotion of "Raulistas" to the top levels of the government provide Raul with a solid base of support should he ever have to take over from Fidel. As a group, "Raulistas" tend to be dogmatic, authoritarian, and deeply distrustful of the United States.

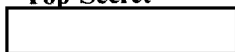
To serve as a link between the party and the military establishment, the Political Bureau established the Military Department of the Central Committee, headed by another ex-guerrilla, Division General Calixto Garcia. He and his department are responsible for formulating military policy options for the Political Bureau and then relaying the Bureau's decisions to the proper government entities and monitoring their compliance. The Military Department is subordinate to the Central Committee's Secretariat—presumably to Fidel and Raul.

Of the 110 members of the party's Central Committee, 26 hold active and four hold honorary military rank and 19 others have transferred in recent years to civilian posts on the basis of their proven managerial skills as well as high rank in the military.

In addition to uniformed personnel, MINFAR—virtually a state within a state—has 31,500 civilian workers employed in factories and repair facilities in Cuba and in building roads and airfields in Africa. Many are employees of MINFAR's Central Directorate for Housing and Construction, which in addition to military construction, builds housing and apartment complexes for military and civilian personnel of both MINFAR and MININT.

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MINFAR has its own educational system for officers and other personnel. There are about a dozen "Camilo Cienfuegos" Vocational Military Schools throughout the country to provide secondary education for youths who have decided to pursue a military career. One school has been set aside for youths preparing for the Air and Air Defense Forces (DAAFAR) and two others are for prospective midshipmen. These "Camilitos," as the students are called, are the prime source of candidates for such advanced institutions as the Mariel Naval Academy, the Camilo Cienfuegos Artillery School, the Military Technical Institute, and the General Antonio Maceo School of Combined Arms, which are Cuba's service academies.

The General Maximo Gomez Armed Forces Academy is Cuba's national war college, with Soviet and Cuban instructors. Eleven institutions of higher education, including the Universities of Havana, Las Villas, and Oriente, provide military training for more than 10,000 students, who receive commissions in the reserve upon graduation. An additional six such institutions will be graduating reservists by 1981. In addition, more than 20,000 students are participating in military training programs in 40 secondary schools, triple the number of schools offering such training in 1978. MINFAR also operates technical schools, such as the Armed Forces Economic Management School, the School for Minor Specialists, and Camp Barbosa for air defense technicians.

MINFAR publishes its own party journal, *Trabajo Politico*, and MINFAR and MININT jointly broadcast over national radio a daily program that forms the core of a political indoctrination class for military units throughout the country. The program usually takes a harder political line than do other segments of the Cuban propaganda apparatus.

Reservists participate fully in major exercises.

The high readiness of the reserves has allowed Cuba to rely heavily on them for service in both Angola and Ethiopia. According to Raul Castro and other Cuban leaders, at least half of the enlisted

personnel who have served in Africa have been reservists. When returned to civilian life, they become part of a pool of combat veterans subject to callup for several years.

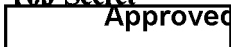
Before the Cuban involvement overseas the leadership believed that the postrevolutionary generation knew nothing of life under the Batista regime or of the endurance of the guerrillas that overthrew him. The leaders feared that military service had come to be regarded as undesirable rather than a patriotic duty. There were even difficulties in motivating the Youth Labor Army, a paramilitary group organized to aid in the civilian economy. The hope now is that the returnees from overseas will have developed a sense of revolutionary esprit.

#### Equipment for Modernization

Before the intervention in Angola the Cuban military was structured as a home defense force. Its mission since 1959 had been to assure the survival of the revolutionary government against attack. The Army was composed almost entirely of infantry divisions without a great deal of mechanized travel capability; the Air Force was largely an interceptor force with no bombers and few aircraft equipped for airlift or assault; and the Navy was equipped and trained to protect the coasts against invasion and infiltration.

There were few weapons that could be considered as offensive since the withdrawal of Soviet combat units with their strategic ballistic missiles and jet light bombers in 1962. This situation did not change until 1975 when Fidel Castro signaled a change by announcing that Cuba would receive new weapons from the USSR at least through 1980. Since then all branches of the Cuban armed forces have received new weapons in an upgrading of the Cuban military. The deliveries reflect a change in the Soviet policy that withheld certain equipment in order not to grate on US sensitivities. The ground attack version of the MIG-23 swing-wing fighter-bomber and the MI-8 combat helicopter have been introduced into the Cuban Air Force. Recently an attack submarine, Cuba's first, was delivered to Cienfuegos.

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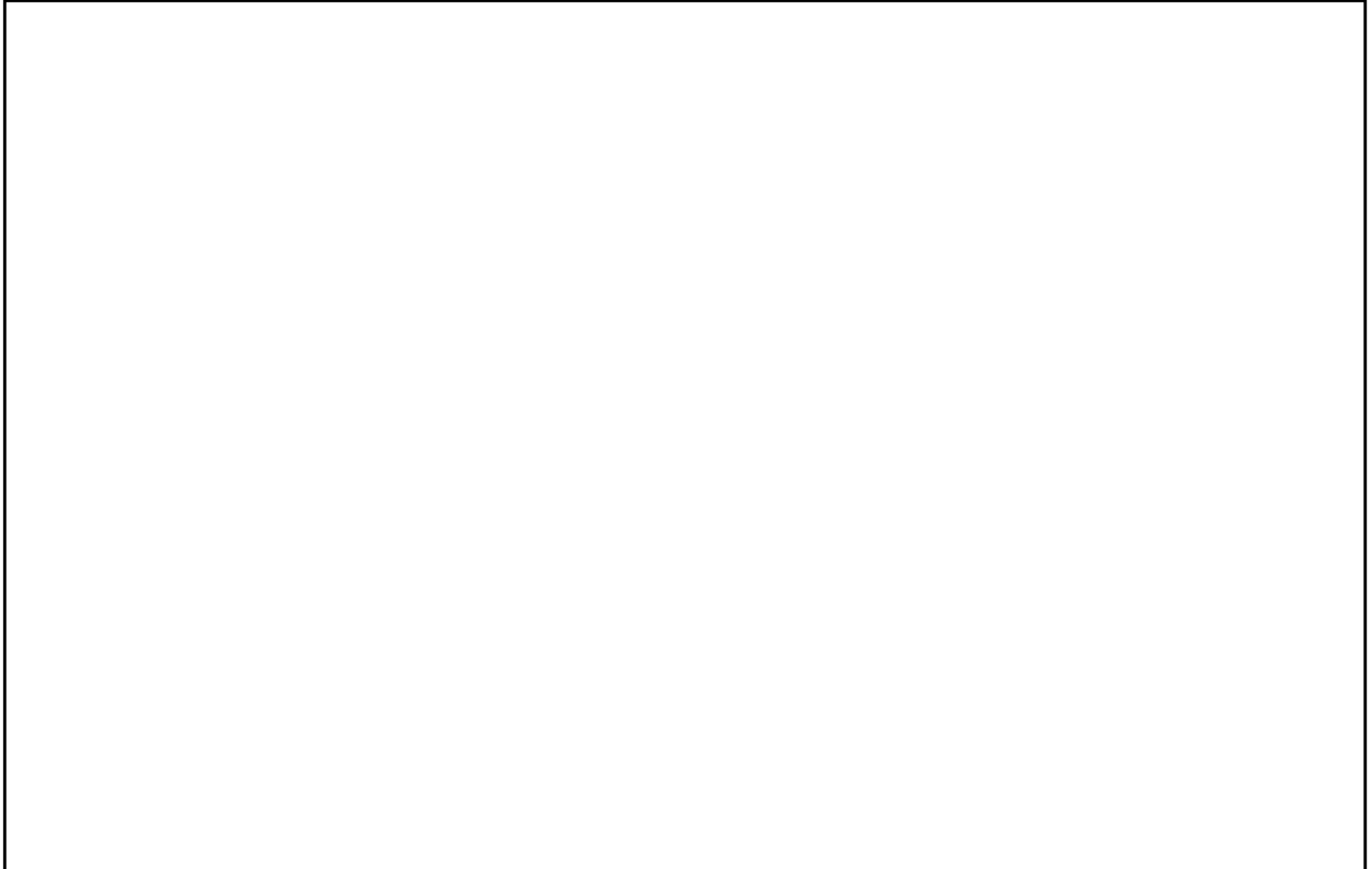




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### Ground Forces

The equipment arriving from the USSR and the combat experience in Africa indicate that the Cuban ground forces are adopting more mobile concepts of operation patterned after those of the Soviet Ground Forces. The 2 January military parade in Havana marking the 20th anniversary of the Cuban revolution included two paratroop units "belonging to landing and assault troops" and a unit of naval infantry "capable of carrying out different types of combat in any theater of military operations." [redacted]

Thanks to Soviet largess Cuba has an arsenal of weapons that is more than adequate for a 160,000-man army, a 60,000-man active reservist element, and almost any callup of civilian personnel. Since mid-1975 the Cuban Army has received ZSU-23/4 self-propelled antiaircraft guns, T-62 tanks, towed field guns, fire control radar for antiaircraft artillery, BM-21 tactical multiple rocket launchers, SA-7 man-

portable surface-to-air missiles, BTR-60P armored personnel carriers armed with antitank guided missiles, BMP-76 armored combat vehicles, BRDM antitank vehicles, and mobile engineering and bridging equipment. [redacted]

These weapons are being added to an inventory that includes some 720 tanks, 615 personnel carriers and reconnaissance vehicles, about 160 truck-mounted rocket launchers, 20 FROG (Free Rocket Over Ground) transporter-launchers, 3,400 antitank missile launchers and guns, more than 2,100 field artillery pieces and mortars, and 1,500 antiaircraft artillery. [redacted]

The Cuban ground forces are organized into four territorial commands: The Western, Central, and Eastern Armies, and the Isle of Youth Military Region. In addition, expeditionary forces are in Angola and Ethiopia. The armies contain a total of four corps. When mobilized for war the armies and corps probably

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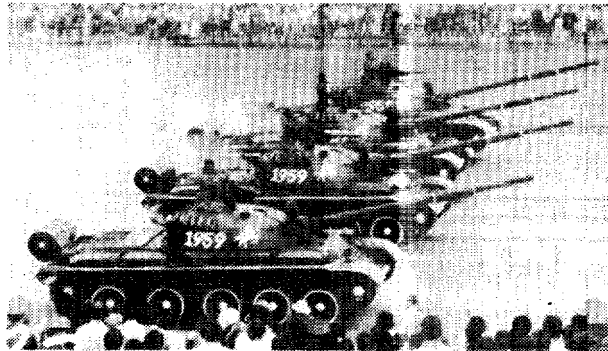
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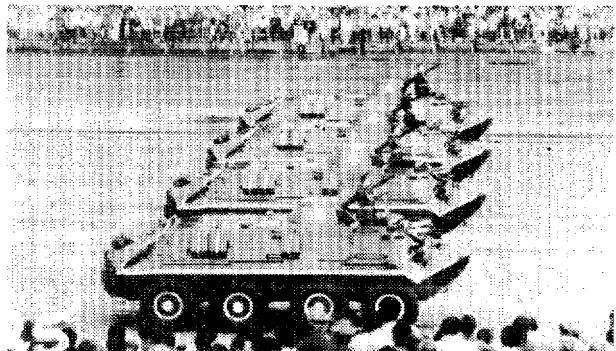
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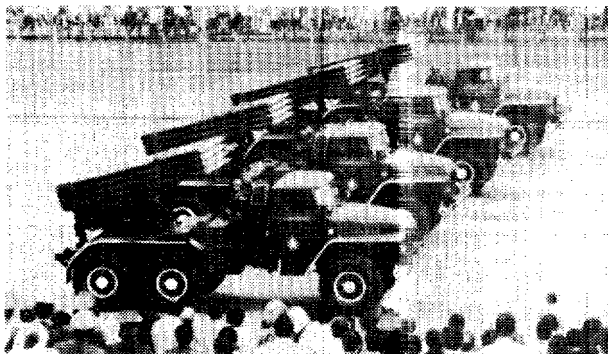
*T-62 medium tanks*



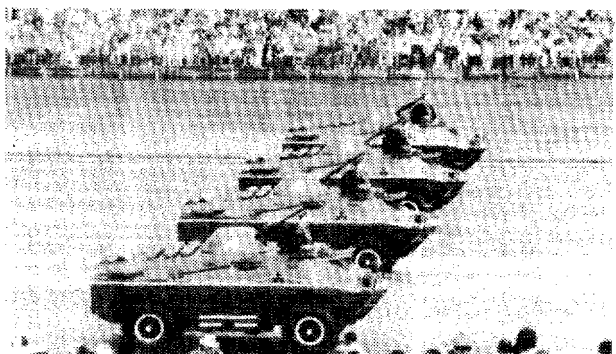
*Armored personnel carriers*



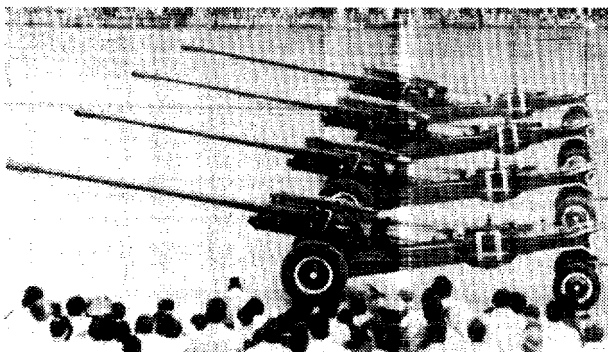
*Tactical rocket launchers*



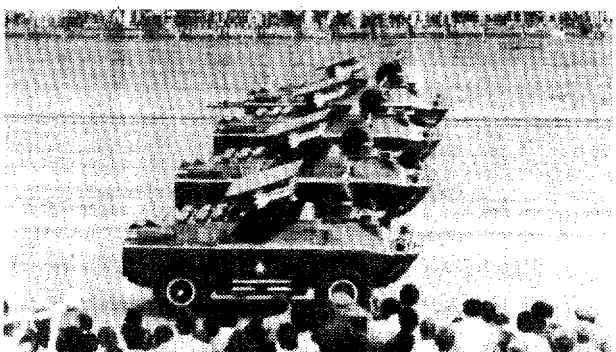
*Armored combat vehicles*




*130-mm field guns*



*Armored vehicles with antitank missiles*



Since 1975 the Soviet Union has supplied a variety of mobile equipment to the Cuban Army. 

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will become equals, subordinate to MINFAR's administrative and operational control. [REDACTED]

For normal tactical operations, a Cuban Army can be considered equivalent to a corps, controlling up to nine divisions each containing about 5,000 to 7,000 men. The Cuban forces in Angola and Ethiopia apparently are organized into regimental or brigade combat teams. They are not normally integrated into the host country's command structure. [REDACTED]

#### Air Force

In the last two years, the Cuban Revolutionary Air Force (FAR) has received variants of the MIG-23, the assault variant of the MI-8 helicopter, and new models of the MIG-21 interceptor. In addition to increasing the size of the force, these new aircraft bring new capabilities for interceptor, ground-attack, and troop-carrying missions. [REDACTED]

can deliver that load farther than other Cuban aircraft. It can carry a heavier bomb load than the IL-28 light bombers that the Soviets withdrew from Cuba in 1962. [REDACTED]

In November 1978 the Cuban Minister of Transportation told a US official that Cuba would receive the MIG-25, a high-speed and high-altitude interceptor and reconnaissance aircraft. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Should the MIG-25 enter the Cuban Air Force, it would provide a chance of challenging SR-71 overflights, but would not improve the Cuban Air Force's ability to patrol international air corridors or to identify slow-flying aircraft in Cuban airspace at medium and low altitudes. [REDACTED]

In early 1978 the Air Force consisted of less than 6,000 men, including only about 500 active pilots. There was little if any surplus in the number of proficient pilots, and many were not trained to fly jet fighters. [REDACTED]

The FAR has 381 military aircraft, excluding utility variants. These include 204 jet fighters (125 of which are MIG-21 fighters), 85 military helicopters, and 92 transport and cargo aircraft. [REDACTED]

#### Air Defense

The other main element of the Cuban Air and Air Defense Forces is the 10,000-man surface-to-air missile force. It, too, is receiving new weapons, but in contrast to the Air Force it lags behind the air defenses of several Warsaw Pact and Soviet-allied states using Soviet weaponry. [REDACTED]

The ground attack variant of the MIG-23 gives the Cuban Air Force a new capability. The airplane carries a heavy load of ordnance—up to 16 100-kilogram bombs when the load of fuel is reduced—and

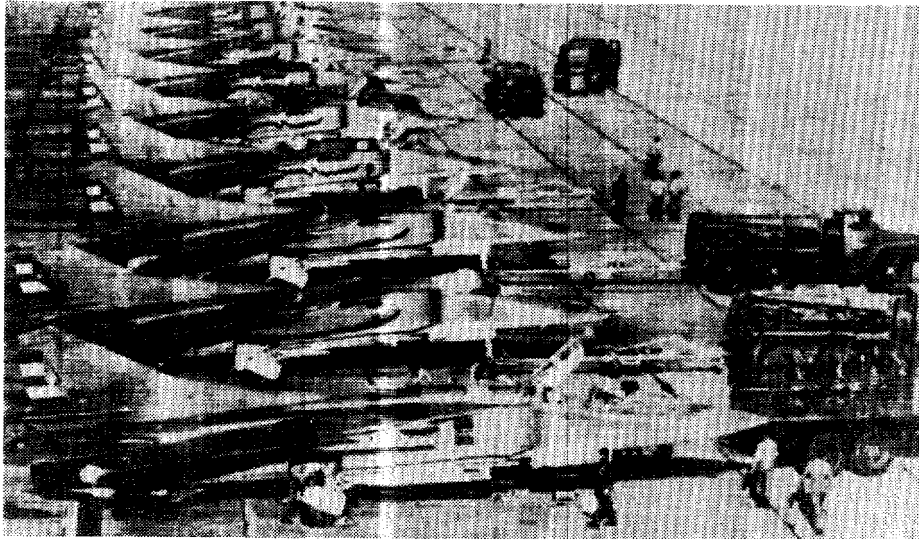
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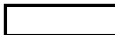
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*MIG-23 fighter-bombers*



*The Cuban Air Force acquired aircraft designed to attack ground targets in 1978.*



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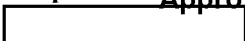
*MI-8 attack helicopter*



25X1 [redacted] The SA-3 system complements Cuba's 18 SA-2 air defense missile sites, is more effective against low-flying aircraft, and 25X1 [redacted] makes the overall air defense system less vulnerable to 25X1 "jamming" by an attacking force. 25X1 [redacted]

[redacted] 25X1 The Air Defense Force's 10,000 members are divided among the surface-to-air missile units and the radiotechnical troops. Taken together with the Air Force, the Air Defense Force is capable of defending key population and industrial centers against anything short of a major attack. Its major weaknesses are its dependence on the Soviet Union for material and

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technical support and a shortage of trained personnel.

The Soviets also delivered two Turya-class hydrofoil submarine chasers in February. The Turyas do not carry the gear for antisubmarine warfare the Soviets use, but this equipment could be added. The delivery of the Turya-class boats marked both their first export from the USSR and the first time that Cuba was the initial foreign recipient of a Soviet weapons system.

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The MGR has 10 S.O.1 small submarine chasers and four Kronshtadt large submarine chasers for escort duty. All were built before the 1960s and are inadequate for modern antisubmarine warfare. This inadequacy became apparent during the Angolan war when the MGR tried to guard the movement of merchant ships and troop carriers through the Caribbean, but its escorts had insufficient range to go past Puerto Rico.

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DAAFAR controls little or no antiaircraft artillery. Instead, SA-7 man-carried and shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles and ZSU-23/4 and ZSU-57/2 vehicle-mounted, self-contained antiaircraft guns seem to be apportioned to ground force units.

## Navy

The mission of the Cuban Revolutionary Navy (MGR) is defensive. While the Navy is thought capable of shielding Cuba's coast against anything short of a large-scale multforce attack by a major power, it can carry out only limited operations at sea and has virtually no antisubmarine capability. It is, however, one of the best-equipped and best-trained navies in Latin America. Its 10,000 personnel operate approximately 100 ships and boats as well as a land-based coastal surveillance radar network.

## New Tactics

The Angolan and Ethiopian campaigns gave Cuban officers practice in managing forces in various types of offensive and defensive tactics, commanding both Cuban and foreign troops, and in logistics.

The MGR has received five new Osa II-class guided-missile patrol boats since mid-1975. The addition of these small craft, each armed with four SS-N-2 Styx cruise missiles, strengthens the major antiship attack element of the Navy—14 Komar-class patrol boats each armed with two SS-N-2 Styx cruise missiles, and five Osa I-class patrol boats each armed with four SS-N-2 guided cruise missiles. In the past few years, the Soviets also have supplied three small minesweepers to the Cuban Navy.

In early February the Cuban Navy took delivery of its first submarine—a conventionally armed and diesel-powered F-class. Besides serving as a showpiece, the submarine will contribute to Cuba's antiship defenses. Shipments of submarines to Libya and India indicate that more releases for Cuba will be forthcoming.

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**Economic Costs**

The modernization of the armed forces and their deployment in Africa have not imposed a serious burden on the Cuban economy because:

- The large-scale Soviet subsidization of the Cuban armed forces has held Havana's direct defense expenditures to only 7 to 8 percent of its gross national product.
- The regular armed forces employ only 11 percent of Cuba's military-aged males (17 to 34 years) and less than 6 percent of the Cuban labor force. Both the manpower pool and the labor force will rise sharply over the next two decades. [REDACTED]

Despite the absence of a formal military aid treaty, Soviet support of the Cuban military is extensive. We estimate the value of Soviet military material assistance to Cuba over the 1960-78 period at a minimum of \$2 billion. [REDACTED]

Massive Soviet assistance has enabled Havana to keep defense expenditures at relatively moderate levels. The 7 to 8 percent of estimated GNP in 1978 devoted to defense outlays is well above the 1.4-percent average for other Latin American countries but is generally comparable to the United States, the United Kingdom, and Taiwan, and far below the USSR, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, and Israel. Cuban per capita expenditures for active duty personnel averaged only about \$5,750 in 1978 compared to about \$6,725 for the other Latin American countries. Even if the amorphous budget categories of "other activities" and "reserves" were included in the defense category, Cuban defense outlays would total no more than 15 percent of GNP. In either case the economic cost has been eased by diverting a portion of Cuba's defense outlays to the nonmilitary sector; for example the 100,000-man paramilitary Youth Labor Army is funded by the military but is involved in civil action programs, including such agricultural pursuits as sugarcane harvesting. [REDACTED]

**Cuba: Military-Aged Males (17-34 years)**

Mid-Year	1000 Males
1978	1376
1979	1417
1980	1468
1981	1523
1982	1579
1983	1634
1984	1684
1985	1730
1986	1771
1987	1809
1988	1853
1989	1901
1990	1943
1991	1972
1992	1989
1993	2000
1994	2008
1995	2010
1996	2005
1997	1993
1998	1973
1999	1949

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[REDACTED]

## Cuban Merchant Fleet: Selected Years 1958 to 1978<sup>1</sup>

Number of Ships	Year End	GRT
15	1958	41,000
21	1960	53,000
33	1965	152,000
53	1970	303,000
58	1973	342,000
59	1974	387,000
60	1975	418,000
63	1976	439,000
68	1977	498,000
74	1978 <sup>2</sup>	537,000

<sup>1</sup> Includes all ships with a GRT of 1,000 tons or more.

<sup>2</sup> Figures for 1978 are preliminary.

Neither have Cuba's armed forces constituted a serious drain on the domestic labor force. Havana has drawn only 160,000 men from a pool of 1.4 million males of military age.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, due to a baby boom in the 1960s, the number of males of military age will rise sharply through the early 1990s—as will the labor force. Given the modest prospects for economic growth, Cuba's ability to provide productive civilian employment for jobseekers is limited at best. [REDACTED]

### Air and Sea Lift

Although the Cuban armed forces lack a long-distance lift capability, civilian transport has been and is readily available. When Cuba began moving troops to Africa in late 1975, three Bristol Britannias that belonged to Cubana Airlines before the revolution played a key role. These turboprop transports, with major maintenance done in the United Kingdom, carried about 80 troops each at a cruising speed of 300 knots. [REDACTED]

Since the Angola airlift, Cuba has accepted four of six expected Soviet-built IL-62 jetliners. Patterned after the British VC-10 airliner, these aircraft can carry nearly 200 troops at speeds of 435 knots. [REDACTED]

<sup>2</sup> Military age is defined for this paper as from 17 to 34 years old.

At the beginning of 1975 Cuba had 59 ships over 1,000 gross registered tons (GRT) totaling 387,000 tons in the civil merchant fleet. By the end of 1978 there were 74 ships of the same size totaling 537,000 GRT. This amounts to a 39-percent increase in tonnage since 1974. In 1976 Cuba required less than 15 percent of its cargo ships to carry troops and supplies to and from Africa. There was no interruption of normal commercial operations. [REDACTED]

### Conclusions

Despite the lack of a believable threat of foreign invasion or attack, the Cuban armed forces will not soon return to the pared-down status and lesser importance of the early 1970s. The supply of military equipment from the USSR seems limited only by the ability of Cuba to assimilate it. Raul Castro's visit to the USSR in late February, his acceptance of the Order of Lenin, and his meetings with the highest ranking Soviet military figures all signify that the close association of the Cuban military with the Soviets and the consequent flow of Soviet arms to Cuba will continue. [REDACTED]


Moreover Cuba's military presence on the international scene is not diminishing. The Cuban military effort in Africa shows no conclusive signs of a slowdown, and Fidel Castro is not reluctant to send troops abroad when requested. [REDACTED]

Finally, reliance on military reservists has worked well in Cuba. The influence of the military establishment on schools and civilian life in general is therefore likely to spread. [REDACTED]

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